

▼▼▼ Preface

This book attempts to fill a gap in South Carolina social studies texts. The gap has been there for a long time, even though recent texts have reduced it a little. For most of South Carolina's history between European colonization and the early 1900s, African-Americans were a majority of the state's population. Yet histories of the state rarely give more than a few pages to the contributions of African-Americans.

Scholars have ignored or failed to emphasize the contributions of African-American for a number of reasons. Some of those reasons are not very pleasant to consider. For much of the state's history, whites believed that African-Americans were inferior. Because whites controlled the schools, that belief was built into the books they chose to use. At worst, African-Americans were called savages. At best, they were simply ignored. Of course, this made it hard for African-Americans to think well of themselves.

In spite of this, African-Americans did maintain their pride and preserve their culture. A few African-American scholars, like W. E. B. DuBois, did studies in the early 1900s that proved the great importance and value of African-Americans to the nation. However, these scholars were ignored for a long time.

As open prejudice began to decline after World War II, the explanation changed a little. Scholars wrongly assumed that African culture had been lost during enslavement. Scholars treated African-Americans as a people without a history and culture of their own. Lacking their own culture, they would adopt European culture. The only thing that slowed down the process was racial discrimination. With the end of discrimination, they could become just like European-Americans. There was a negative side

to that belief, a side that still was built on prejudice. Although usually not stated, most scholars assumed that European culture was superior in almost all ways. The dominant scholarly belief was that little from African culture was worth preserving or remembering.

In recent decades, research and study have found that all this was wrong. Scholars of both races have confirmed what average African-American citizens knew in their hearts all along. African-Americans have made valuable contributions to the state and nation throughout history. For example, think about the small farmer who scratched out a living in the nearly worn-out soil between the end of the Civil War and World War II. He was not just a small farmer barely avoiding starvation. He and thousands of others were small businesspersons who were the backbone of the state's economy. Yes, their lives were often quite miserable. Many did fail. But those who endured helped build a foundation for future progress just like tiny sea creatures build coral reefs which sustain life all around them. We now know that many African-Americans went well beyond being small farmers. This is the story of all these people.

The values and institutions Africans brought with them were not all lost. Rather, they were sometimes ignored or forgotten. But they were still there. In addition, African culture influenced European culture. What we know as South Carolina is not really European or African. It is a blending of both. This is the story of the contributions of African culture to South Carolina culture.

Although the main emphasis is on South Carolina, we must also look beyond the state. More Africans came to America through South Carolina than through any other single state. This links South

Carolina to the impact of Africans on the entire nation. Just like in South Carolina, African-Americans have contributed to American life and culture in many ways that few people understand. We hope this book will help you understand.

This book falls more into the category of what historians call social history rather than political history. This means that our main emphasis will be on how people lived. We will look at the institutions African-Americans created, like churches, schools, businesses, and communities. We will look at their family lives and how they managed. We will look at the things they created, such as arts, crafts, literature, and music.

Even though social affairs are the main focus, we will also look at some political history. You cannot understand people's lives without looking at the political forces that shaped opportunities. Politics is the study of power. Indeed, much of the history of African-Americans in South Carolina is the struggle to gain enough power to increase choices and chances. This is a story of two steps forward and then one step back. It is the story of determined struggle. It is the story of persistence and endurance.

Contributions is a key idea throughout the text. What does contributions include? We take a broad view. Obviously, includes material things like buildings,

wealth, inventions, crafts, and even art.

When we get into art, we have crossed over into a different area, the area of ideas. Art is not just an object. It is also the idea behind that object. It is the feelings that are inspired by that object. So contributions must also include ideas and feelings. Many ideas and feelings are found in art, such as paintings, literature, crafts, and music. Ideas and feelings are very rich and important contributions.

Ideas and feelings are also a part of human organizations, like churches and social groups that inspire and help others. So we will look at cultural institutions as well.

Institutions that help people suggest another category in addition to material and ideas. Contributions can affect our behavior. This includes speech, dress, what we eat, and how we work and relate to each other. The endurance that we will see in so many people in this book is a major contribution. Their endurance inspires us to engage in a long term struggle just as they did. The seeds we plant today may make a better world for those that live long after we are gone.

Someone very wise once said that the best thing you can do with your life is be a good ancestor to those who come after you. You will meet many good ancestors in this book.